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All Lost in the Snow

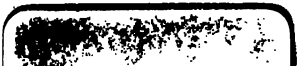
BY

Mrs. William Olding.





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ALL LOST IN THE SNOW:

A Tale

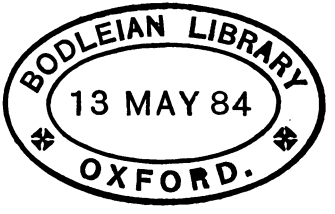
FOUNDED ON FACT.

BY
MRS. WILLIAM OLDING,
AUTHOR OF
'THE BIRTHDAY BOOK OF POETICAL WEEKS,'
'THE YOUNG CROSSING SWEEPERS,'
'MADELINE,' ETC.

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INTRODUCTION.

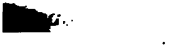
THIS little rustic outline of family life, to which the infinite charm of reality is lent, has been written with a view to cheer troubled hearts by showing that the love of the Lord and His sympathy are enough for each and all of us under any, even the darkest, circumstances.

If it should tend to cheer and comfort some of Christ's loved ones, who, faint and weary, are battling with the storms and sorrows of life—if it should inspire in some others a love for the God of Nature, and better still for the God of grace, I shall have all the reward I crave.

'Full well I know I have more tares than wheat—
Brambles and flowers, dry stalks, and withered leaves;
Wherefore I blush and weep, as at Thy feet
I kneel down reverently and repeat
"Master, behold my sheaves!"'

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ALL LOST IN THE SNOW.

CHAPTER I.

AN ALPINE HOME.

At the foot of the Bernese Alps, one of the most beautiful spots in Switzerland, the scene of my tale lies. There, on the slope of one of the rising Jura mountains, is a cottage—thatch-covered, deep rich moss adorning the thatch, and wildflowers peeping through here and there—a cottage with over-hanging gables, under whose eaves the swallows build their nests, and twitter and chirp merrily, as they fly in and out in search of food for their expectant young ones. And there in that cottage on the slope dwells Rosalind—Rosalind Rosencrantz, the beautiful Rosalind Leblanc of days gone by. And yet not long

gone by! For Alphonse and Marie Leblanc, her parents, are still lamenting the loss of the chief attraction to their farm—for they are farmers, you must know, and prosperous ones too—the attraction to them, so rich and beautiful, 'rare and radiant as the maiden whom the angels named Lenore.'

But their regret, sincere as it is, has lost its keenest pang. For their child has gone where they would have her go. In the same village she had long known Franz Rosencrantz, the son of a worthy stonemason; and he, endowed with all the taste and genius of a sculptor, had worshipped her as his beau-ideal. Their attachment had been long and genuine. They had been acquaintances in infancy. Together they were taught at the same village school: together they played on half-holidays: together sang in the church choir: together, after school hours, they stood to view the wonders that the village blacksmith worked: together, in winter, they learned to skate on the ice, sending forth merry peals of laughter as first one and then another met with a downfall: together, as far *back as they* could remember, they had

known the luxury of hay-making, with all its fun and frolic, and together experienced the pleasure of gleaning for some poor, or old, or widowed villager.

But Time, passing on, had wrought his customary changes. The children had grown to man and woman: the lovers had been transformed into man and wife. And still, O wondrous Time, another change! Three merry little voices prattled now round Rosalind; and there, in her little cottage on the hill, sits she, busily employed at her needlework, while her heaven-sent treasures —Eva, and Ulred, and Eulalie—play at her side.

Do you want to know what these little treasures were like? Well then, listen. Eulalie is a beautiful child, with dreamy, liquid eyes, and a halo of golden hair. She is fair-skinned, with the slightest touch of the rose on her cheek, and she has a flexible mouth. When she speaks it is like the song of a bird—such an outburst of childish happiness—no thought for the morrow! One scarcely notices her features, the expression is so sweetly innocent, though intelligent and

refined. Ulred, with his raven locks thrown back from his open brow, forms a pretty contrast to her; while Eva's deep pensive eyes, long eyelashes, and rich auburn hair, which falls about her in rich profusion, adds yet another charm to the assembled picture of the three. Rosalind's heart swells as she thinks of them and of all God's goodness to her. She had it—she always would have it, that children have much the same influence over us as angels; that they are given us by God to purify our hearts and homes, and that they are much nearer God than we are in receptivity, through innocence and simple trust. If anyone questioned it, she merely replied that Christ said Himself—'Of such is the kingdom of God.'

And thus she muses constantly! But not for long moments together can a mother, such as Rosalind, muse in such happy self-communion. She must be busy always; and she is busy to-day. So she works with her head and her hand, and she amuses her children with her voice and her heart. She speaks to them now of a visit she proposes they shall *make, and* delights them all with pictures of

the joy that visit shall call forth. They are to spend a few days—perhaps, if they are good, a few weeks—at Renaissance, where old Grandfather Alphonse and dear Grandmother Marie live; and they are to have great fun there. For no little children could be with them without more than a sufficiency of fun. What do they say? Do they like the picture? We shall see.

CHAPTER II.

A VISIT TO RENAISSANCE.

WELL, at Renaissance they are—in a little French house in a secluded village, in the midst of farms, the homes of peace and contentment. Leblanc is a fine old man, hearty and hale, and one of the wealthiest farmers in the village too. He has a tall, erect, and muscular frame, a noble brow, and silver hair hanging down over his shoulders. His farmhouse stands in a fruitful valley, at the entrance to a wood—a wood such as the poet paints, whose calm shade brings a kindred calm, while the sweet breeze that makes the

green leaves dance wafts a balm to the world-worn and weary heart. Meadows stretch far and wide on every side—cornfields and orchards, as Nature's adornments, surrounding them.

And what do the children in such an Eden as this? Roused by the cock at early dawn, they follow Leblanc's shepherd as he leaves his mossy cottage, and drives his flock from the crowded fold to enjoy the verdure of the morn. The old man, who has long been a servant on the farm, is only too delighted for them to bear him company. Before they start for the distant meadow, he takes them into the shed where the cows are being milked, to give them each a drink of the new, warm milk, that falls so musically into the pail. But music prettier still they may hear if they choose.

One of the girls is singing at her work, and looking furtively up at her lover who stands close beside her:

'Shame upon you, Robin,
Shame upon you now!
Kiss me, would you? with my hands
Milking the cow?

Daisies grow again,
Kingcups blow again,
And you came and kiss'd me, milking the cow.

'Robin came behind me,
Kiss'd me well, I vow;
Cuff him, could I? with my hands
Milking the cow?
Swallows fly again,
Cuckoos cry again,
And you came and kiss'd me, milking the cow.

'Come, Robin, Robin,
Come and kiss me now;
Help it, can I? with my hands
Milking the cow?
Ringdoves coo again,
All things woo again,
Come behind and kiss me, milking the cow!'

She is singing so sweetly that the children stand all on tiptoe to listen to her song; and a smile passes over even the face of old Grenoble, the shepherd: for the girl who is singing is his own Silvie, and the ruddy young fellow who stands so enraptured beside her is Robin, the cowherd, her devoted swain.

Silvie perceives her father, and stops abruptly, offering the children milk out of a little can, which she dips for the purpose in the pail of new milk before her; while Robin moves off, and with his long fork reaches down hay for each full-uddered cow.

Grenoble stays with the children for a few minutes, to let them enjoy the scene, and then, begging a cake for each child from the dairy-maid, who is busy butter-churning, he calls his dog; the sheep follow him, and flock and children and all proceed to the far-off meadow. How cool, how fragrant their morning stroll! Old Grenoble, often as he treads the same path, finds fresh beauties in earth, and air, and sky. Listen! hear him now.

'Look, missie, yonder comes the powerful King of Day.'

'How beautiful! how beautiful!' exclaims the enraptured child. 'The sky is all azure and gold! Look, Ulred! Look, Eulalie! Why, the sun is making everything shine—all the rocks, and the hills, and the water too!'

'Yes, and that tower in the distance is burnished with gold,' continues the old shepherd-poet. '"Prime cheerer light," I say.'

'And don't you like those little dew-drop Grenoble, that stand poised on every bla *of grass?* Aren't they beautiful? Moth

loves them so! I know what she would say if she were here, because she says it so often at home:

'"Look, look! on yon grass-blade all freshly impearled,
There are all of your jewels in one;
You'll find every wealth-purchased gem in the world
In the dew-drop that's kiss'd by the sun."'

I only wish she was here to see them. Don't you?'

'Ah! missie, that I do. Many and many's the day Miss Rosalind—I mean your mother, bless her—went out with me before you ever knew her; and often and often she'd try to catch the dew-drops, and take them in her hand, just as you're doing now: she said they were so beautiful; and when the sun shone on one she'd call it a rainbow, because of the glittering colours there; and sometimes she'd wash her face with the dew, pretty creature, and say it felt so fresh, and made her just like a flower. I used to think so too.'

'Shall I, Grenoble? Shall I wash mine?'

'If you like, missie.'

So there was a general face-washing with

the early morning dew; for Ulred, and ev
little Eulalie thought they must do the sam
especially as they heard their mother h
often done it when she was a child.

These cleansing operations over, t
shepherd penned his sheep in the fold; a
each little child, as its mother had so oft
done before, pleaded to help feed the floc
so the kind old man gave turnips from tin
to time into each little hand; and Eva, Ulre
and Eulalie called up and fed as many
the sheep as they pleased. Meanwhile
scattered the fresh turnip-tops over the fiel
then he gathered the little ones round hi
and led them home to their grandparent
before the heat of the day became too o
pressive.

The children, you may be sure, received
hearty welcome from their grandparent
and Grenoble himself was ushered into t
hospitable farmer's kitchen and served wit
substantial fare. When well satisfied, he s
out again with crook and staff, to regain h
flock; and shortly after you might have see
the drowsy shepherd as he lay reclined, wit
eyes half-shut, by the side of the brook

beneath the floating shade of grey willows. And thus, in some such pleasant way, the days passed happily.

CHAPTER III.

THE ACCIDENT IN THE WOOD.

THE autumn had arrived, and sweet on the autumn air was the odour of flowers in the garden of Renaissance. Eva was still there —Eva with her pale face, just as much blush on it as the white rose, her large auburn eyes of extreme sweetness, long hair, soft and glossy, but thick, and her features of more than ordinarily feminine delicacy. Eva was much loved by her grandfather; she was, indeed, *almost* his favourite. And she had prolonged her stay till now, while the others had returned to their Alpine home.

She lay on the grass, and peered up into the sky, the bright blue sky, through openings in the branches of the trees, and wondered at the beauty of the contrast. And as she lay there, Alphonse Leblanc, watching the child from his window, was assuring Marie,

his wife, that she was shedding a soft rad
ance on everything around her.

'The cattle lift their voices,' said he, 'fro
the valleys and the hills; and the feather
tribe rejoice on every side; but the o
sound of which I am enamoured, the sou
that fills my heart with glee, is the trill
Eva's voice, as she sings to herself in h
quiet childlike joy. Eva's love-warblin
over God's works, I call them.'

'She was pointing out to me the beau
of the forest glades yesterday,' said Mar
'What do you say to taking her to see t
wood-cutters in the forest? That would
quite a new sight for her, and give her a ne
subject for thought.'

'I will,' said the old man; 'I will take h
now; the sun's rays are becoming too powe
ful for her to lie where she is much longe
and we shall get plenty of shade in t
forest. So just put us up a little dinner, a
we will make a picnic of it.

'Here, Eva!' called the old man, and t
child was soon at his side. 'Would yo
like to go into the forest and see the woo
cutters felling down trees?'

'Into the grand old forest yonder? Oh yes, I should indeed, grannie!'

'Well, then, your grandmother will put us up something to eat and drink, and we will make a long day of it; and you can take a basket with you, for you may go nutting there, when you are tired of watching the wood-cutters and the gnarled giants of the forest.'

'Thank you, grannie, very much! I shall save some for Ulred and Eulalie till I go home again.'

'Well, run away then with your grandmother, and she will find you a little basket for the nuts.'

Marie soon returned with the provisions, and little Eva was by her side, holding fast her own little treasure, as pleased in prospect as if it were now full. Eva and her grandfather took a little refreshment, and then they started.

They soon came to a rustic little hut where the goatherd lived—a hut made of logs of fir and cedar, transversely cut, and protected by a thick coating of clay, which, after drying in the sun, had become almost

as durable as stone. There were patches of moss, lichens, and aromatic herbs to be seen on the roof; and the vine and fig so trellised over the humble doorway, interwoven here and there with the rose and hyssop, that the latticed window could scarcely be seen through the pendent leaves. Eva thought it was quite a little picture of a hut. The goatherd thought so too; he had a strong love for his home, humble as it was. There he and his widowed mother spent many a happy hour together, for while she applied herself assiduously to the distaff within, he would sit and read to her from the Holy Bible, or from Bonar's sweet hymns; or, when she laid her work aside for the night, he would take his flute and sit outside, while she sat by him, in the cool of the evening, under the overspreading cypress-tree.

Leblanc and Eva just stopped to bid good-morrow to the widow, and then passed on till they came to the edge of the forest. They entered the wood: there stood venerable column after column, shaking its green *coronal* of leaves in the breeze towards

heaven; and the old man seemed awed into silence by the beauty of the scene, and the thought of the love it betokened.

'Only to think, grannie, that this great tree sprang from an acorn,' said Eva. 'Mother told us all the oaks had sprung from acorns; doesn't it seem wonderful?'

Just at this moment a squirrel was to be seen gathering the nuts that had fallen from a neighbouring tree, and then Eva caught sight of another eating an acorn, in the very oak under which they were standing.

'Oh look, grannie, look!' she exclaimed, in her excitement; 'what a beautiful little animal!'

'Ah, Eva! do you know,' said her grandfather, 'that we are indebted to these beautiful little creatures for many of our fine oaks?'

'How so? Do tell me,' she pleaded.

'Well, you know that the squirrels lay up a large store of nuts and acorns in the autumn, so that they may have food in the winter; they bury them underground, dig holes for them under the trees, and then forget all

about them, if they have more than t
want for food. So they remain under
ground, and the acorns spring up as o
And what is more wonderful still is that
oaks that spring from the acorns chosen
the squirrels are always the finest, beca
God has placed a knowledge in the squir
called instinct, which leads him to choose
best acorns.'

'I see, grannie, now. I can understa
that,' said the child.

'Now turn and look at the twis
branches of this oak, Eva; they add so mu
to its beauty. And observe the horizon
direction its boughs take; see over wha
large space they spread; and, tell me, do
you think the oak the grandest tree of t
forest? But I see you are not listeni
Eva; you are so engrossed with the beau
of the little squirrel, you can think of nothi
else just now.'

'It is beautiful! it is so graceful, grann
See how it springs from bough to boug
Could I catch it and take it home, do y
think? I should so love it.'

'*I think* not, it is much too agile in

movements. But come along, or we shall never reach the wood-cutters, though now I can hear the ringing sound of their axes very distinctly; they cannot be far off.'

As they advanced the monotonous strokes of the axe were varied, from time to time, by a crackling noise, which told that some ancient denizen of the forest had at length bowed to his inexorable destiny, retaliating as far as possible by crushing numbers of ambitious and rival saplings all around.

When Leblanc and Eva reached the spot, the woodcutters were proceeding vigorously with their work. They had already succeeded in cutting down, since the early morning, one noble specimen, stripping it of its branches, and otherwise trimming it. Leblanc pointed out to Eva other trees that were marked out as destined to follow.

Then he joined the overseer and talked awhile with him, while Eva played about and filled her basket with what she would; and Jack, the dog, Leblanc's old favourite, yawned and stretched himself under a neighbouring pine, as he trustily watched the basket of provisions that had been brought

from home; no doubt he expected, according to habit, his share when the good time for refreshment should arrive.

Hours passed away very pleasantly and almost imperceptibly, and the poor dog felt sometimes inclined to think that he was quite forgotten, the ordinary meal-time had so long gone by. But at last his patience was rewarded, for his master and little Eva began to feel hungry themselves, and then they thought of their companions, the wood-cutters, and lastly of poor old Jack, the dog.

One of the men was busy in front, clearing off some of the lower branches from the next tree marked to fall, so as to lessen the labour of the woodmen in felling it. Another was close behind, making the great trunk of an oak vibrate to its centre; and some others were still farther off. But they all very willingly assembled at Leblanc's invitation, and shared the repast with him and Eva, rested awhile, conversed pleasantly, and then returned together to their work.

Leblanc and Eva still sat on where they were, silently watching the grand old oak

that was so soon to fall. They were near enough to see everything, but far enough off for perfect safety.

Presently there was a great crackling noise which told that the woodman's axe was doing its work well, and the monster tree was visibly giving way. The branches shook again and again, and a little squirrel that was safely hid therein took fright, and sprang from bough to bough. Eva was all excitement: she hoped to get him; but still the bough was too high. All at once she bounded forward: the tree was falling with a great crash, and the squirrel was falling with it.

Leblanc saw her danger and rushed to save her—only just in time. As he was retreating with the child safe in his protection, the trunk rolled over a little, the outermost branches rebounded from the ground, and then struck him in the face. It was all the work of a moment. Henceforth he was for ever blind. He felt he was hurt, but he scarcely thought he was injured for life. Still, the work was done. The fine old man, who had so enjoyed nature in every

form, was left to commune now with natur
God alone.

Eva was inconsolable.

She had always loved him; now she wou
never leave him. Oh! how she wished s
had never seen and longed to catch t
squirrel—the cause of the sad accident.
they had only stayed at home and nev
gone to the forest! Oh, how differently t
day had finished from the manner in whi
it began. Oh, the dear old man! what cou
she do for him? She poured out her litt
heart's grief to the Lord, AND HE ANSWER
HER, though she scarcely knew how He cou

All her prayer was for her grandfath
She asked nothing for herself—only that
might be comforted somehow, and help
somehow, and made happy in his blindne
and that she might always be a little help
to him, to soothe his way and cheer him, a
that the Lord would show her how; for
was so hard to lose the sight of all t
beauty of which the earth was so full. A
the Lord heard her, and little Eva becan
to her grandfather a constant guide a
[redacted]*mpanion.*

And if she had been old enough to understand the beauty of the only plaint he ever made, when alone with his own wife, over his blindness, she would have seen that even then a celestial light shone inward, which irradiated his mind through all its powers, and brought him into the sweetest and closest union with nature's God and with his own.

Very shortly after, one day, as Eva entered the room, she heard him saying, as if to some one present whom she could not see:

'I murmur not that I no longer see,
Poor, old, and helpless, I the more belong,
Father supreme, to Thee;
This darkness is the shadow of Thy wing—
Beneath it I am almost sacred—here
Can come no evil thing.'

Then she was satisfied. She never spoke a word—she thought the converse was so sweet. She recognised it was his Heavenly Father to whom he was speaking; and she stole quietly upstairs to her own little chamber, and, falling on her knees, she thanked Him for His beautiful answer to her prayer. And her poor little heart was comforted.

That night the moon and all the galax of stars were witnesses to one of the grande attributes of God—His comforting and al consoling power.

CHAPTER IV.

A LOVED ONE'S DEATH.

RETURNING to the immediate time of Leblanc accident, we find that the wood-cutters we arrested in their shouts of glee at the fall the tree by the sound of a sudden and heav groan.

Looking round, they observed the cause it. There lay Leblanc, trembling with agon —pale, and the blood gushing from his brow- while Eva stood by his side, horrified an helpless. For a time the child seeme stunned: then, as her grandfather fainte from loss of blood, thinking him dead, sh clasped her little hands together and crie 'Oh! I have lost my dear! I have lo my dear!'

Very few moments elapsed before all th *wood-cutters* were on the spot, and und

the direction of the overseer a rude pallet was formed from the branches of the fallen trees, while he himself moistened the old man's lips with water from a streamlet which meandered through the wood.

Not a moment could be lost in useless regrets, if they hoped to return life to the unconscious form before them: so dipping a handkerchief in the fresh water beside them, they bound up the old man's temples, and placed him on the rugged couch the woodmen had hastily contrived.

As they did so they were rejoiced to see that the fresh water and the movement had sufficiently roused him from his swoon for him to open his eyes and gaze wildly round, as if in wonderment as to his whereabouts: and a transient gleam of hope shot through their hearts, as they saw him stretch out his hand for Eva, who eagerly grasped it. But the old man—cold and chill as death, even on this hot day—his icy hand as heavy as lead, falling upon his heart, that had almost ceased to beat—immediately swooned away again. Meanwhile he was being gently but rapidly borne in the

direction of his home: and the sagacio dog, who had never left the side of h master, but had all the while crouched l him, almost as if he understood the painf realities of the case, took fast hold of t hem of Eva's dress, and keeping close to h side, followed poor Leblanc.

As they neared the house, little Eva, t excited in her sorrow to march any more the slow rate of the wood-cutters, brok from them ere she could be stopped. Su denly Marie's quietude was intruded upo by the child's quick entry into the roo where she was sitting. Rushing into h arms, with tears, she uttered the most plai tive cry of entreaty. 'Oh! grandmothe come and see! Do come! Poor grannie poor grannie!'

Strangely agitated, without staying to as a single question, the old lady rose quickl from her seat, her lips trembling and pal overcome by emotion.

She saw the procession approaching; an with the tenderest tones of love and sorro mingling in her voice, but dissembling *much as possible* her feeling, she hurried o

to the pallet on which her husband lay. 'Oh! Alphonse! Alphonse!' she cried. Then she became aware that he was unconscious—pressed her lips to his, in an agony of grief, and turned aside to give vent to her sorrow in tears, as she led the way to his room.

Leblanc's companions of the wood laid him gently on his bed and departed; but the grey dawn of the morning, as it broke over the mountain-tops, saw Marie still by his side.

The village doctor came, and gave every hope of Leblanc's life and speedy restoration to consciousness; but he was unable to conceal from Marie her husband's utter loss of sight.

'Have mercy, heavenly Father! Have mercy!' ejaculated the sorrowing wife; and little Eva, by her side, in her sweet childish voice, but with deep earnestness, added, 'for Jesus Christ's sake. Amen.'

The sad news soon spread through the village. For a time Marie bore up bravely, perhaps almost too bravely! Then she succumbed to the fatal effects of the shock, and a stroke of paralysis laid her quite low.

Thus both Alphonse and Marie Leblan
who were once so conspicuous for the
beauty that a more handsome couple, it w
remarked, had never been seen in the villag
lay in the same house, shattered, disable
and in many respects incapacitated for t
enjoyments of life. Well for them they h
learned not to hope too much from eart
On the contrary, Alphonse and Marie I
blanc experienced a mysterious peace—
peace flowing from their close relationsh
to the Lord. They realized Him to be th
Father: wondered at the long culture
which He deemed them worthy, and t
warmth of the love that could suffer wi
them for their good.

There was in the universe, for them,
God-forsaken darkness. When they h
passed the precincts of communion with
other spirits, still they felt they had th
Father, God, left with them: they we
not alone in their sorrow, be it ever so e
treme; they had a sympathizing friend
Him. He could and did touch the m
hidden springs of their being, and t
deepest depths of their spirits.

More, God's relationship to them as a Father brought thoughts of their own Rosalind to their minds: they knew how she could lead and bend them to her will; they were conscious that they lived but in her happiness—and they knew they were dearer to God, even, than she to them! For a mother may forsake, or forget; but God, never! never!

So they waited for His love to sanctify them by sorrow, and looked forward to the time when He should raise them to Himself.

Yes; it was the beautiful thought of the Fatherhood of God that gave Marie and Alphonse Leblanc peace in the midst of their afflictions. 'The burden of life is such that "God with us" alone can sustain its pressure,' says one: and just now the Leblancs found it true.

But they were made strong through fellowship with God: through the realization and appreciation of His presence—His brotherhood with sorrow and grief, weeping, bearing, pleading, striving, as when once He trod the weary pathways of this world for us.

They felt God knew them—knew what

was best for them, and wished to satisfy all their desires, as far as was consistent with their good: and they loved Him in return. So they lived in the sunlight of His love—waiting, longing, pining, panting even, at times, for the fulness of their Father's promised presence in their eternal home.

And now that troubles seemed to thicken around them they only fell more heavily on the bosom of Divine Love; for God *is* Love. And that accounted for their mysterious peace!

Before her affliction Marie was a most beautiful old lady, with one of those delicate roseate complexions one sees at times in old people who have lived a quiet, wholesome country life. To her Alphonse had always entrusted all the domestic arrangements: she did little outside her own household, except at times teach a few children to read, or spend spare hours in knitting stockings for the poor or old in the village, for whom her sympathies were very keen. Marie was a constant and devout reader of her Bible, and experienced much happiness in the

friendship and love of Jesus, and in communion with His people. She had always proved an admirable helpmate for Leblanc, aiding him in all things, sharing his troubles as well as his joys. Naturally, she was a woman of a most cheerful disposition, very hospitable and liberal, but with no attempt at an external appearance of luxury.

Alphonse felt it a crushing blow when she was struck down by paralysis and became a silent cipher. It preyed on his spirits and affected his health. He felt the difference keenly, though perhaps not quite so much as he would have done before his accident, when he would have missed the smile which tends to make home so sweet—'the mutual look when hearts are of each other sure.' Happily for him, he could still hear her voice, and that reminded him of all the joys that once crowded his household nook, and all the pure affections of home seemed still to surround him.

And beautiful Eva was there—still there, though he could not see her, with the expression of deep earnestness peculiar to her, by turns weeping—

'To behold not
His meek, blind eyes again,
Closed doorways, which were folded,
And prayed against in vain,'

and then telling, to anyone and every one, the tale of her grandfather's love, and how she had caused his sorrow through her foolish thoughtlessness, till her little heart was full of the one thought: 'What can I do for him?' She did so enjoy (with a quiet joy of her own) the birds and flowers, the trees, the hedge-rows, and the fields; and there was such a childlike simplicity of affection in her, that she wanted him to enjoy them too. So she began to describe what she saw as she sat. And perhaps there is nothing the blind enjoy more than oral descriptions, which enable them to look about them through other people's eyes: it relieves the monotony of their existence. So, as from time to time the old man cried out in his glee, blind-fashion, 'I see, Eva! I see!' the child realized her success, and her mission in life was settled. From that day forward it was her work to cheer him in his dull path (as she feared it might be) through *life, and light* it up with pictures of every-occurrence for him.

Oh! how she cherished

> 'His low, soft words, made softer
> By speaking *in the dark!*'

And when he became a little stronger, and could get about again, how many a landscape his little guide made fair for him by description, that would otherwise have smiled in vain for his dull orbs. Through how many otherwise dreary miles of land she led him, making them bright and joyous by her description, while he basked in the sun, and *felt* (if he could not see) his powerful influence.

Sometimes he was afraid he should get tiresome to her, as he asked again and again for the picture of each day's changeful beauty; but the child never tired. She showed him

> 'The sunshine by the heat;
> The river's silver flowing,
> By murmurs at his feet:
> The foliage, by its coolness:
> The roses, by their smell;
> And all creation's fulness,
> By Love's invisible.'

She gave him the tints as fresh as they came from the Creator's hands, and the clouds as

varying as she could find words to describe them: and then the old man would add to her little store of knowledge from day to day, telling of the habits of each tree, and the reason for the changing beauty of the clouds.

And when she had given him fresh subject for thought he would bid her run and play; and drawing on his remembrance of the past—the time when he too enjoyed the sense of sight—he would call old scenes vividly up before him, and league with them the sweet associations connected with wife or child in the time of his happy, simple farm-life. Or perhaps his thoughts would wander to other sufferers, whether from sin or sorrow, and the one universal Saviour from sin and suffering; and he would wonder how people could reject Christ—people who had heard of His wondrous deeds, His pardoning power—people who had seen His character as displayed in His works.

It never struck him as strange that all the Magdalenes found their way to Jesus, that all the sorrow-stricken and distressed *should naturally* bend thither-ward; but it

did seem strange to him that any should keep aloof! Why, the very thought of Jesus cheered his heart and turned his darkness into light! He wondered that all should not venture on His goodness, who never yet turned away one Who came to Him! How often, to his faith, Jesus of Nazareth passed by; and it was enough for him. He was in the loved presence; he gained a smile or a word from Him. And he fed on it: it was a feast for him.

How often he said,

'Pass me not, O tender Saviour!
Let me love and cling to thee.'

He knew his very suffering would prove an increased incentive with the loving, sympathizing Saviour, to come to his aid: so the more depressed he felt, just the more, the only expression to which he mentally gave utterance was—'Jesus, Thou Son of David, have mercy on me.' And it always brought him joy and gladness, be the subject of his melancholy and gloom what it might. It was true prayer, and it reached the throne of God: it reached the heart of the Saviour!

Eva, coming suddenly upon him one day

in the garden, as she was passing by, heard these words:

'On my bended knee
I recognise Thy purpose clearly shown—'
My vision Thou hast dimmed that I may see,
Thyself—Thyself alone.'

'Grannie,' she said, in her musical voice.

'Ah, child, where were you going?'

'To you, grannie; only to you. Grandmother is asleep, and I was coming to walk a little with you.'

'Is she sleeping calmly?' queried the old man.

'Yes, so calmly; with a sweet smile on her face.'

'That's well.'

* * * * *

That very night, as Eva lay dreaming in her little bed, her grandmother, whom she loved so well, was suddenly removed: the Master had come, and called for Marie. She had passed off in an apparently soft slumber, probably as the effect of another stroke. And in *her* bed, in all the solemn stillness of death, she lay. But her soul had made bright entrance into the land of light, 'through the [redacted]*rnal Love.*'

A short week passed, and a simple hearse decked with flowers was borne forth to the churchyard: and the village girls, whom Marie had taught to read, and by whom she had often sent home presents of stockings of her own knitting, were there by common consent, dressed in robes of snowy white, waiting to follow the mourners to the tomb.

Very few were the words of the dear old pastor of Renaissance at the grave, and very beautiful he looked, with his silver locks hanging over his shoulders, his head bent, and his eyes suffused with tears, as, in touching tones, he said: 'Jesus knows the crushing power of grief. To shed bitter tears is, to Him, no sign of an unchastened will: it was the same human nature in Him that drew forth His own tears; and He Himself will comfort you all, in His own time, and in His own way. Grief will not always flow like this, even for you: it must have an ebb. There is no cloud, be it ever so threatening, but has a silver lining to it: and there is no night, be it ever so dark, but preludes a day of light. So turn alone to Jesus, poor mourning relatives, in this, your hour

weakness and sorrow, and He will gently untwine your hands from all other and inadequate supports, and, though unseen, He will walk near you and give you rest.'

Then taking the hand of poor Leblanc, before leaving, the old man added sympathetically: 'Turn to Jesus, poor broken-hearted friend, for all that I can say to soothe you would fail to comfort you to-day.' And Alphonse Leblanc warmly pressed the proffered hand in token of his appreciation, and then left the grave—blind and a widower, but happy in the friendship of Him who 'sticketh closer than a brother.'

One month after, and you might have seen Leblanc on his way to Blumenthal; with Franz and Rosalind and Eva he was henceforth to dwell.

CHAPTER V.

THE STOLEN DOLL.

AND had you been there, what would you *have* seen? Three little children, daily trotting on their way to school, the one school

of the village, standing in its own ground, and hidden almost by the evergreens which covered it. But they went there no longer alone, although there was no harm in their doing so; for the villagers were all simple folk, and dwelt together in harmony. It pleased Leblanc now to accompany them on their regular journey, and they enjoyed his company.

They enjoyed their school-life too. The school was dear to them. The schoolrooms were quite of the village type. In the boys' room, more especially, the forms were notched and inked all over. There stood a small pulpit-desk for the master; a few books, old, dog's-eared, and badly used, were to be seen; on the mantelpiece, laid aside, was a motley collection of boy's property, such as balls, tops, marbles, knives, and fruit, which had evidently been unwisely introduced at lesson hours. On the master's desk lay a dunce's cap and the cane—terror of refractory or idle children—and the walls were decorated with the best talent of the scholars, with texts and moral sayings in verse and prose. Drawings, too, were displayed, bearing testi-

mony to an artistic taste developing or developed in the school, and emulating others to a similar proficiency. In the girl's school, in addition, samplers were to be seen, and the best specimens of writing and needlework. The ambition of the children, both boys and girls, appeared to be to reach the first seat on the front form.

It was a proper ambition, and created a suitable rivalry. And it made the days pass happily away. But as happily passed the *evening hours* for the young Rosencrantz children. When very young, before they went to bed each night they had been taught to pray, while kneeling at their mother's knee, and to sing to her; and now that they were older, they found out nightly a resort where the three together could offer their evening song of praise. Sometimes it was the service-tree arbour, starred all over with golden flowers, the delight of the bee: and sometimes it was the top of the staircase, outside the cottage: sometimes they hid altogether away from sight. But Rosalind could hear the sound of their sweet young voices, *even* when she could not see them,

rich and full, singing clearly and with pretty pathos, 'Saviour, breathe an evening blessing.'

It was their evening prayer together. Then each little child knelt, and told his or her own wants and wishes, silently, to our one Father in heaven. At such times Rosalind and Franz would whisper to one another, 'May it ever be so with them;' and Leblanc, sitting by their side, would add a solemn and heartfelt 'Amen.'

* * * * *

It was well they had been taught to pray. For there are times when there is no consolation to us such as prayer. This we shall see.

Among Eva's little schoolfellows was one, a tender child she knew as Rachel, of whom she was particularly fond. The child was a great sufferer, and this naturally drew Eva's sympathetic heart towards her. She had been long ill, and for some time absent from school; and Eva had begged permission to call on her little friend. She was in great grief about her, for she told her mother she had never been able to find that she loved

Jesus, and her heart seemed so hard! Then Rosalind assured her little girl that there was no heart beyond God's power—that the God who made the heart could always touch it: and the child ran off happy.

'Oh, Rachel!' she said, as she entered the bedroom, 'I've come to see how you are. I am so very sorry you are ill and unable to come to school.'

'You were always kind to me,' sighed the child, for Eva was the *beau-ideal* of poor little Rachel's life.

'I've come to talk to you about the Lord Jesus that loves us all so,' continued Eva. 'He came from heaven to die for us!'

'Speak on, Eva,' warmly responded little Rachel; 'I should so like to hear of some one who loves me; for father and mother are both dead, as you know, and no one ever speaks a kind word to me now! They were always kind to me,' she sighed.

'Poor little Rachel! Does nobody ever tell you how the Lord Jesus loves you; how He loves all little children, and orphans more than any? Mother taught me a *verse about* them: "When my father and

my mother forsake me, then the Lord will take me up." She said the good King David, who loved the Lord, knew that this verse was true, for he had often been a witness to its truth.

'Poor little Rachel!' she said again, stroking her; 'you're ill. Has no one told you how the Lord cares for you, and how He'll help you to bear your pain, and send kind friends to you, and take you to heaven, to have rest and peace at last with Him? And how you may be His little child, if you ask Him, and He will be your Father?'

'No!' said the child sorrowfully, shaking her head to add force to her assertion. 'Marie Brune never talks to me: she only keeps me here, and feeds me, and minds me. I used to be so glad to come to school after you came; but now I'm ill and I can't come, so there's no one to talk to me, or care for me now.'

'Then I think Jesus sent me to you,' said Eva, in her sweetest voice, 'because He wanted me to tell you that HE loves you: and there is a beautiful world where Jesus lives, and He wants to have us all there

with Him—you, and me too, Rachel! I know He loves you, Rachel,' she continued, 'for He loves me; and He'd be more sure to love you, because you're alone and ill, and you have no mother or father.'

'Do you think so?' said the child, as she sighed again; 'nobody else does.'

'That's all the more reason why I'm sure He will, and *does*,' said Eva, with still greater emphasis. 'I never knew anyone so full of pity as Jesus!' And a tear stood in her soft, pensive eye, as she rose and said, 'I must go now, Rachel; grannie is waiting for me, with Ulred and Eulalie, outside. But remember, *I* love you too, Rachel, and I shall come again.'

Eva's words sank deep into the child's heart, and her sweet earnest manner touched her—most of all, perhaps, that quiet tear, and her last words, 'Remember I love you too, Rachel.' And the next time Eva came, she looked up with solemn awe into her face, as one too good for earth, and said simply:

'Eva, I will ask the Lord Jesus to love me, if you think He will—I should so like a *little love!*'

'Do, Rachel,' said Eva; 'tell Him just what you have told me. But He does love you, whether you tell Him or no; and He is here, close by, though we cannot see Him, and He has heard all we have said to one another, every word; and He loves everyone. So He loves you; and He loves me too.'

'But, dear Eva,' said Rachel, evidently with great difficulty, 'I want to show you something I took from the toy-shop in the village, when Marie Brune sent me to buy a ball of twine. I do not think Jesus can love me after that.' And she held up a little doll, and at the same time turned so deadly pale that Eva thought she was going to faint.

Eva's eye flashed, and her cheek deepened in colour as she said, 'Oh, Rachel! Rachel!' Thoughts seemed to be passing through the child's mind for which she had no power of utterance: she appeared repelled by the guilt of the little orphan: and then, again, she remembered how destitute of any proper influence or comfort the child was. And

she pitied her, much as she abhorred the idea of taking what was not one's own.

And then Eva thought of the penitent thief, to whom the Saviour gave His promise of full and free forgiveness; and she told the tale to Rachel, with her childish comments, till Rachel gave her back the doll she had stolen, and begged her, with tears, to take it and throw it away, for she could not even bear the thought of it.

'No, Rachel,' said Eva; 'I cannot throw it away, because it belongs to Frau Schön; but I will take it back for you, and say how sorry you are you were tempted to take it, if you like.'

'Oh, thank you!—how kind!' said the child, evidently much relieved.

And Eva did take it back; and, what is more, she obtained forgiveness for her.

'She will never steal again, I think, Frau Schön,' said Eva, 'now she sees what suffering it caused the Saviour to be able to forgive a thief!'

Oh, what soothing and beautiful thoughts Eva left behind her for poor little Rachel! *With what* pleasure she dwelt on those

words: 'There is a beautiful world where Jesus lives, and He wants to have us all there with Him: you and me too;' and of those other words, 'Jesus loves you:' and she wondered whether she should ever get there—to Paradise—where the repentant thief had gone. And then she remembered what Eva had said to her: 'You must tell the Lord Jesus what you feel;' and she poured out her little sorrowing, longing heart in plaints and prayers to Him.

Did He hear her? Oh, yes! And soon, very soon, all the burden of her song was praise; and she too took up Eva's words and said: 'I know He loves me, Eva, and I am going to Paradise, for He wants to have me too with Him in heaven.' It was not long after that little Rachel very happily 'languished into life.'

Then Rosalind reminded her little daughter of what she said to her when first she was in such distress about her school-fellow, that 'there was no heart beyond God's power; that the God who made the heart could always touch it. Besides Eva,' she added, 'little Rachel was bought with the blood

and anguish of the Son of God. She was His!'

'Yes, mother,' replied Eva, almost in a whisper, as if she had caught the idea; 'He had bought her! I see, she was His—His own!'

'There is a beautiful verse in the Bible on that subject,' said her mother, seeing she was lost in thought on what she had said; 'you may find it, and read it to me. It is in Isaiah xliii. 1.'

So Eva turned to her Bible and read: 'I have redeemed thee; I have called thee by thy name; thou art Mine.'

The following Sunday Leblanc took little Eva to Rachel's grave, that she might see the last of her little school-fellow; and then they sought a sunny spot in the churchyard, where they might sit down and talk together of Jesus, as the same Jesus still that He was when on earth. And the old man pictured Him so vividly to her mind's eye, that she saw Him walking again through the corn-fields with His disciples, or seated on the mountain while the waves beat against the *Galilean shore*. And she climbed again in

fancy the grassy heights with Him, the flowers bending, conscious of His tread: she walked under the olive shades, or by the brook Cedron, along the old, oft-trodden paths, while he repeated to her the words of Jesus, till they mutually heightened one another's love for Him.

And Eva put up her pretty face to thank her grandfather in her simple way, and the old man stooped down and kissed her, and stroked her hair, while she fondled his other hand.

Then Leblanc throbbed with happiness, as he always throbbed with love.

CHAPTER VI.

LOST IN THE SNOW.

WINTER was here again: and there came a day when all the children awoke with loud exclamations of joy at the white snow thick upon the ground, and at the pretty shapes which the frost of the past night had assumed all over the windows of the house.

'How I wish they might always stay like that!' said the golden-haired Eulalie.

When their father witnessed their delight in the frosted window-panes, he threw open the front door; and what reiterated exclamations of admiration there were!

The sun, with his ruddy orb, was firing the horizon, and in the distance the clouds, seen through the leafless wood, looked like some city in a blaze. There lay the whole country before them, powdered over with snow, all tinged with the sun's rosy hue, while the long icicles hung in a ragged fringe from the eaves of the cottage.

How every tree and shrub in the dingle just below sparkled with beauty! How they shone in the early light! How the service-tree arbour glittered in the frosty sunshine, and all the garden roots were silvered over with beauty!

Here and there a red-brick cottage stood out in bold relief against the snow. The grey castle, with its ivy-covered tower, showed clear in the distance; and the game-keeper's lodge, with its little diamond-paned windows glittered too; while the banks were

hung with forms so various, that no power of art could trace them—long wavy wreaths of flowers, and grotto within grotto! A scene of evanescent glory!

It was indeed a charming morning, fresh and calm: and the whole party seemed to enjoy it.

> 'The fire, with well-dried logs supplied,
> Went roaring up the chimney wide.'

Their little home was decked with holly and misletoe: every bosom was light!

The holidays were approaching, and blithe Christmas, merry Christmas, was coming back again; and the Christmas bells would be rung, and the village girls would don their gay kirtles of every hue, and there would be Christmas sports, and Christmas tales. So no wonder they were gay, as they sat round their homely table, and, blessing their Heavenly Father for His many, many gifts to them, partook of their morning meal of home-made bread, new-laid eggs, and milk fresh from the cow.

Breakfast over, Franz poured out his full heart in prayer and praise. It was almost a

hymn of praise he offered to the God of the seasons, a deep, rich overflow of gratitude, to which each one present, even the youngest, responded. And then he begged his Heavenly Father's care of his children through the day, and with many parting kisses, they started for school, village children as they were, right through the snow—old Leblanc and the dogs for company.

Leblanc walked along very happily with his young charges, enjoying the feeling of the fresh frosty air and fleecy snow, as flake after flake fell upon his upturned face.

The snow seemed to fill the earth, and the air, and the sky: it was over the hedges, over the stiles, and over the heads of the people they met—it was everywhere; the children seemed quite in an ecstasy with it: they only wished their grandfather could see it too.

'Oh, grannie!' said Eva, looking up sorrowfully into his face, 'the snow is so beautiful! I wish you could see it. The dogs seem to enjoy it almost as much as we do. There *goes* Rover close behind Ulred's heel, now *creeping slowly,* and now——'

'And now,' took up the old man as she waited a minute in her description—

'"And now, with many a frisk
Wide scampering, snatches up the drifted snow
With ivory teeth, or ploughs it with his snout,
Then shakes his powder'd coat, and barks for joy."

Is that it?'

'Yes, that is exactly right,' said Eva; 'that is just what I was going to describe.'

'And there is Jack, too, snapping at the crystals as they eddy around,' said the old man; 'I can feel him.'

'And Sancho is doing just the same by Eulalie's side,' added Eva. 'Everything looks so pretty!' Then to herself she murmured, as if in thought—

'"Beautiful snow from heaven above,
Pure as an angel, gentle as love!"

Oh! I do welcome the snow back again, grannie; I do like to see the gay sleighs as they flash by like meteors—bright for the moment, and then gone. Perhaps father will come in a sleigh for us this afternoon. I wish he would; it would be such fun!'

'I think not, Eva,' said the old man; 'I expect I shall come and fetch you back

myself, the same as usual. And now good-bye,' he said; for they had just reached the school. And the children all ran and kissed him, and then trusty Jack led him home, while Sancho and Rover followed.

During the morning school the sky darkened and became threatening; and the snow had been so continuous that the schoolmaster and mistress thought it wiser to disperse the children after morning school, rather than wait and take the chance of the weather clearing; so they were handed their little satchels that contained their dinner, and dismissed, being told to make the best of their way home.

On leaving school Ulred and his sisters marched quickly on their homeward course till they passed the village blacksmith at his forge. The smithy seemed very warm and comfortable to the children, as the light burst through every cranny and crevice. They stood a few minutes and watched the labouring bellows; but when the panting ceased, Eva and Ulred said to one another, 'We had better hasten forward, for the snow *seems to come* faster and thicker.'

Then they passed a farm-yard, with sleeping cows lying about; and farther on horses peering over the wall, and scampering away at their approach. There were pigs grunting, pigeons strutting, ducks and geese waddling round about the farm-yard pond, on whose water they had so often sailed. Then came the little village inn, the few shops so well known to the children, the doctor's house, and not far distant the lawyer's, then a few more cottages, and then the pound, in which a strayed ass was confined—and now the well, with its 'moss-grown bucket.' Then came the fields again on either side, and then the grand old forest, at the entrance to which stood the village pastor's house, with its pretty garden.

Here the snow came down faster still, and the driving wind almost took away the children's breath: they could hardly see their way, but they still pushed on—the snow was getting thick now, so thick that it quite covered their little feet; but they battled bravely on, each giving a helping hand to little Eulalie.

The wind swept away to the cedar and

pine-covered hills of the Jura, and raised a rushing and wailing amongst the bare branches that made a strange wild music in the dreary solitude of the snow! Every cottar's family could hear the dismal sound.

A storm broke over the village! The weather for some time past had been very severe, in some parts as low as twenty-five degrees below freezing-point. The children had heard that the quiet waters of the Rumelinbach, a small stream that ran through a part of the country not far from them, being dammed up by masses of ice and snow, had overflowed its banks, and flooded an entire quarter of an adjoining city. They had heard, too, that great damage had been caused by a terrible hurricane—the storm-fiend had leapt from the mountains into the glades of the valley, hurled down whole hamlets with terrific force, and torn up trees by the roots. The hurricane had gone howling through the forest: trees had been shivered in the gale, boughs had been cracked and fallen to the ground, the lightning had rent the trees, and there had been *a general wreck* of nature! They had heard,

too, that in one hamlet of the Bernese Alps, all the cottages had been unroofed, and the unfortunate inmates, on that bitter night, exposed to all the fury of the storm.

They thought that the same thing was going to happen to Blumenthal, and they were afraid. They said they would return to the good pastor's house, and rest awhile. But somehow, in retracing their steps, the wind drove so boisterously, and they were so nearly blinded by the thick falling snow, that they lost their way; they found that they had unknowingly entered the wood—the pathless wood. Then they were indeed horror-struck!

The storm raged for full five hours. Eva could hear that by the music of the village clock, as it fell at intervals upon her ear. And oh! how it opened all the cells of memory.

Then the lightning became less forked, less vivid, and altogether fainter and less frequent; the thunder, from seeming to break over their heads, had gradually died away into a deep hoarse sound in the distance; and the snow and hail beat fast and furiously

against the trees, and ran plashing down from the thatched roofs too—if the children could only have seen it.

The fiercest of the blast was over. Franz decided to fetch the children himself this afternoon; so the horse was harnessed, and extra clothing placed in the vehicle, to keep them from the fury of the storm. Still Rosalind begged him to wait awhile, as she felt sure no child would be permitted to leave the village school in such weather. However, Franz over-ruled it, and started; while Rosalind and her father remained at home, anxiously awaiting his return.

Time passed on, Rosalind little thinking that Franz had found the school closed, and the children all long since dismissed. She began to be very anxious. At first she thought he was waiting perhaps for the storm to abate still more; but when a full hour had gone by and she saw no sign of him, she became wild, and restless, and feverish—so intensely anxious was she, so terribly eager to catch the first sound of their approach—but all in vain!

Another hour wearied away, and then

Rosalind thought she saw something moving in the distance. It soon proved she was right; but, oh!—with what sad news!

Franz had stayed in the village making inquiries. He had traced the children as far as the parsonage, and that was the last he could hear of them. And night was coming on, and the snow again was so dense in its fall as almost to preclude the possibility of his seeing a yard before him. He had no idea what to do! Still, he must return and consult with Rosalind and her father.

Rosalind hastily clad herself, and took extra covering for the children, with hot tea and cake in the vehicle, though she knew she had sent their dinner with them as usual; so she did not so much care about food—they were not starving, she knew; but they must be cold, and frightened too, if they had lost their way. Franz drove hastily back again to the spot where they seemed to have disappeared, while Leblanc kept watch at home, to send word immediately to the pastor's house, as the appointed spot of rendezvous, if he heard anything further about them.

CHAPTER VII.

THE SEARCH.

WHILE their parents were anxiously searching everywhere for them, the little children were not far off; for, blinded by the snow, they had, as we have seen, unconsciously entered the wood.

Soon they found themselves in amongst the trunks of stout old trees, and, to pass onward, they had to part the boughs that clustered in their way; the shade became deeper and deeper, and the way more and more intricate!

Eva began to lose heart—she felt very much afraid they had left the public road and wandered into the forest. She knew a lane ran by the side of the wood for a very long distance, so shaded by trees on either hand that they met together overhead, and arched the narrow way. This she knew would make the darkness greater; still, it would not account for the trunks of trees *against which* they incessantly stumbled, or

the thick undergrowth: and by this she felt sure they must have lost their way, and entered the forest.

If they could only find the finger-post that stood just at the end of the lane, they would be able to tell whereabouts they were; but as it was, they had not the remotest idea. Still they kept moving on, almost in a circle, however—sometimes farther and farther into the wood, and then mysteriously round again —sometimes a little nearer to the dear old pastor's house; but never nearer home.

Oh! they thought, if they could only see the light from some of the clustered cottages in the village then they should know which way to turn; but the wind howled, and the snow beat on them so again that they could see nothing; and they could scarcely hear each other's voices. Still they kept firmly hold of one another—little frightened Eulalie in between them.

There was a woody hollow they knew somewhere near, where they had often come for lilies of the valley: that was only just out of the regular way. If they could find *that* they could get on to the road again, but

they could trace no sign of it; they were sure they were on level ground, not in the old familiar hollow.

Oh! to be at home with their father and mother! Oh! for any friendly hand or voice to help them!

They knew the Pastor Rosegarten's house was somewhere just at the border of the wood, and Ulred called loudly, till his poor little heart failed him: 'Fritz Rosegarten! Fritz Rosegarten!' echoed and re-echoed through the wood; but no answer came from Fritz Rosegarten, and no answer came from the village.

The snow was almost blinding them!

If the parsonage had been close by, and a light in the window, they would not have been able to see it for the thick falling snow. They were so tired, and all the light was fast fading away. It was getting dark, and they were cold and hungry too, for they had had no tea. Oh, for anyone to direct them! They had walked such a long, long, weary way!

'Oh, father! oh, mother!' sobbed the little *children.* But the wind howled so, that

though both father and mother were close by, on the edge of the wood, calling loudly, and oft repeating the call, neither heard the other.

Oh! if only any waggoner would but pass with the tinkling of the horses' bells, the smack of the carter's whip, the rolling of the heavy wheels, the rattle of the harness, that they might know whereabouts the familiar lane to the village lay—how it would cheer that cold, sharp interval between night and morning, they thought.

After hours of weariness that seemed almost years in misery, the distant streak of light widened and spread, and turned from grey to white, and from white to yellow, and day was there again. But none of its cheerfulness came with it, for the snow lay too thickly on the ground to allow of much traffic, even in the village roads; and as to the forest, it was pathless, and almost impassable.

Every sound was hushed. There was no singing of birds, no green leaves were to be seen, no waving grass, no wild flowers, none of the thousand exquisite scents and sounds

that had so often delighted them, as they floated on the air, were present before them; everything was covered over with ice or snow.

Meanwhile Rosalind was becoming quite ill with anxiety, but keeping it, as far as could be, to herself.

Franz saw it, and determined that she must go home for a while at least, and take some food, and rest, if possible.

But she could not, she said; she would go home for a little while, if he liked, for she thought it was too much for her father to be left so long alone.

So Franz drove her back again. The table was spread with the best she had in the house, and drawn up to the fire, and she sat down with her husband and father, each with the simple intent of keeping up the appearance of happiness, and of cheating the others into eating. But there is an exhilarating effect in simple wholesome food, taken when one is in need of it, deny it who will; and each one rose from the table refreshed, and better fitted for his or her painful work. *Rosalind felt* glad she had yielded to Franz's

entreaties and come home for the sake of the others; and she felt, too, better able to meet what was before her.

The day was darkening into night again; the winter days, alas! were short; but the villagers were aiding in the search.

As it grew dark, the wind fell. By degrees it lulled and died away. Then it came on to snow again, and the flakes fell fast and thick, soon adding to the ground some inches of an extra depth, and spreading abroad a solemn and deathlike stillness amongst them all, as it extinguished their last hope.

The snow fell on the eyelashes of the villagers and froze there; it obscured their sight; their limbs felt too numb with the cold; and mournfully they left Franz and Rosalind alone—all except his friend Hans. It was useless to search any more in the dark.

Meanwhile, though little Eva felt bitterly cold, if you could have seen her you would have found that she was acting, as usual, an unselfish part; her thoughts were far removed from her own suffering or anxiety; she was thinking of Eulalie, who lay sleeping at her

side, and of Ulred, who was evidently in great distress and apparent dread; and very often her thoughts were with her mother and the other dear ones at home, for she knew in what grief they would be at their long-continued absence.

All the events of her short life passed before her—the slightest incidents, tones, and faces, and scenes of long ago; until at last her mind became quite confused as to where she was, and why they were all three there together. She was feeling the numbing effect of the cold too. Then she spoke to her brother, and Eulalie woke up. They began to move forward again. Sometimes they stumbled, and were roused by an effort to prevent themselves falling; their feet tottered; less and less of hope and strength remained to them; they were faint and spiritless, and exhausted; still they dragged themselves along, though they felt the time was close at hand when their powers would utterly fail.

At last they sank to the ground perfectly *silent,* in a state between sleeping and waking —*but one after* another they soon yielded to

the drowsiness that came upon them; and in that dark, still, strange spot, they slept as peacefully as if in their little cots at home.

When they awoke again the moon was shining through the trees, and they rose and wandered on a little further; but Eva moved with difficulty, for pains that racked her joints were increased by every exertion. Her senses of sight and hearing were becoming duller and duller; still she made no complaint, she gave no sign of suffering, until at last, weak and spent, yet very calm, the numbness of the cold taking greater effect on her, she sank to the ground (she felt the hopelessness of ever being extricated from the place) and the others only too willingly sat down beside her. Then, pressing close to one another for warmth and comfort, they offered for the last time a prayer that God would raise up some friend for them; and for that last sad time the three little voices essayed, though in vain, to join in their oft-sung evening hymn:

'Saviour, breathe an evening blessing,
Ere repose our spirits seal;
Sin and want we come confessing,
Thou canst save, and Thou canst heal.

'Though destruction walk around us,
Though the arrows past us fly,
Angel-guards from Thee surround us;
We are safe, for Thou art nigh.

'Though the night be dark and dreary,
Darkness cannot hide from Thee,
Thou art He Who, never weary,
Watchest where Thy people be.

'Should swift death this night o'ertake us,
And our couch become our tomb,
May the morn in heaven awake us,
Clad in light, and deathless bloom.'

Then they slept, folded in one another's arms. A strange tranquillity crept over them, and with a smile on their faces they fell into slumber—a slumber from which they were never to awake. It was the sleep of death!

* * * * *

That same night, as the moon rose in all its gentle glory over the children, while Franz was still from home patiently pursuing his search with his old friend Hans, Rosalind looked down on the sleeping village, with its modest spire, thatched roofs, and gable ends, deep in the valley's shade; and on the far off winding river, with its track of light; and on the distant hills, and the devouring forest: and as she did so, she thought of *their mutual* loss (for she felt sure the chil-

dren must have perished in the wood), and she fell down on her father's neck and kissed him, and burst into tears.

The moonlight lent a wanness to her pale and delicate face, showing off her natural grace and beauty, which contrasted strangely with the worn and haggard look of her poor old blind, though still handsome father. The old man stroked her head, and held it close pinioned to his breast; then, with all the affection it was possible to throw into the words, he cried, 'Little Eva! little Eva!'

'Her voice had always such a sweet sound to me,' he said. 'It was so much like her mother's, like yours, Rosalind. What peaceful days we have had—what pleasant quiet times! What happiness we have enjoyed!'

Then she saw the tears gather in his eyes, and he took her hand in his, as he had been accustomed so often to take little Eva's. And she placed her head again on his shoulder, and they comforted one another so till Franz's return.

For a whole night and day they had made every possible effort to trace the children, but without success. It was now deep in

the middle of the second night when Franz returned hurriedly, saying he and Hans had heard the howling and baying of a dog in the forest, and they thought perhaps Rover had found the children, for it sounded like his voice.

In the midst of their deep grief no one had thought of Rover (he had been left last in the stable as usual, under old Klein the stable-keeper's charge). Franz went hastily to see if the dog was still there, and, to his joy, he found him absent—he was gone; he had apparently broken his chain and made his way after his young master, Ulred.

There was no doubt now in Franz's mind, nor in that of Hans, that by his keen powers of scent he had succeeded in finding him; and Franz knew that where Ulred was, there the others would be. So he started forth again with Rosalind and Leblanc, not forgetting to take Sancho and Jack with him, hoping by their sagacity to learn the way.

Franz took the well-known road to the school, and then said to the dogs, who had evidently missed their little playmates, '*Good dogs*! go fetch! go fetch!'

Sancho kept his nose close to the ground, as if trying to follow the scent; but it was very nearly, if not entirely lost, on account of the snow. The dog seemed perplexed and disturbed; but immediately he caught sound of Rover's howling and baying, he bounded off in a slanting direction through the wood, and Jack pulled hard, straining on his chain, to follow him.

However, it was decided to hold Jack fast until the return of Sancho, which they felt sure would be very speedy if he found Rover, and with Rover, as they hoped, the children.

And so it proved. They had not long to wait before Sancho returned. And with a very piteous moan and whine, which betokened his grief, he made up to his master, pulling first one and then another forward.

They judged rightly that he must have found traces of the children. So they went immediately with him, following in the path that he directed. But, to the dog, so slow seemed their steps, notwithstanding that they raced and hurried as much as they were able, that he kept advancing and returning, whining most piteously all the time; and Jack

led his old master in the course traced only by Sancho.

As they advanced they could hear more and more distinctly Rover's pitiful howl; and they all hastened on and on, till by the trunk of a hollow oak, in the midst of its gnarled roots, and lying in a semi-recumbent posture, they found the three little children, dead, half buried in the snow and ice, and Rover sitting at their feet as protector, with his head thrown back, ever howling piteously.

But oh! the triumphant brightness of those little faces! It spoke of love, of joy, of peace! Yes, it spoke of Heaven, and they were there!

It was the answer to their evening prayer: for when the morn woke on them, they *were* clad in bright and deathless bloom; they had exchanged their evening hymn of earth for the 'new song' of Heaven.

There was no word spoken. There lay the unconscious little sleepers. God had come into His temple, and they kept silence.

Rosalind, kneeling beside them, kissed *their dead* lips, then flung herself on her

husband's bosom, and sobbed out her grief there.

Then, without voice, without a word, prostrated, exhausted, utterly incapable, simultaneously they all fell on their knees: but only knelt, for their lips were dumb—their sky was darkening around them—it was all they had power for—an unspoken prayer, a mute offering of faith and love.

Silently they rose and went to the parsonage, and they told the pastor all. And Rover followed them, still whining and begging their attention. And then they saw in the faithful servant's mouth a little scrap of paper that told, in Eva's writing, of their trials and their fast-approaching end, that bore the simple message, in the writing of each little child, of their fond love and their last 'good-bye.'

Then Rosalind and her father retraced their steps homeward, and in the dead of the night the good Pastor, Franz, and Hans, together, conveyed the sleeping children home.

CHAPTER VIII.

THE DESOLATED HOME.

'Begin the woe,
Ye woods, and tell it to the doleful winds;
And doleful winds, wail to the howling hills;
And howling hills, moan to the dismal vales;
And dismal vales, sigh to the sorrowing brooks;
And sorrowing brooks, weep to the weeping stream;
And weeping stream, awake the groaning deep;
And let the instrument take up the song,
Responsive to the voice—harmonious woe!'

THE occasion asks it; for poor Rosalind is in that state of stupor which suspends almost all thought; even the fountain of her tears is sealed. 'All Thy waves and Thy billows are gone over me!' is now her only cry. Oh, human-hearted Saviour, give her a balm to soothe her heavy woe!

Once Rosalind had thought what a life were this, if it could only last for ever! Now she felt more inclined to say with Solomon, 'Vanity of vanities, all is vanity.'

The earth that had once seemed so beautiful to her, seemed barren and empty now. *There was* an aching void in her heart. She

knew she was in sight of Heaven, and yet she felt as if she wandered on, a cold and fatherless, forsaken thing, forlorn and uncompassioned.

Poor Rosalind! she was wringing the last drop from her cup of sorrow, quenching the only ray that cheers the earth, and leaving herself alone in the darkness of night without a star, when she forgot that her Heavenly Father was ruling and directing all, and that 'like as a father pitieth his children, so the Lord pitieth them that fear Him.'

If, for the sake of her loved and lost ones, everything wore a different hue; if shadows dimmed her path, and the earth was no more what it once had been to her, still she could trace the paths they had trodden together here, and feel them sacred as paths which led to glory. And so, after a while, she did, when the first stunning, numbing effects of grief were over. And as her thoughts cleared she realized, even in the darkness of her lot, the mystery of the glory that death had opened up to her children. Then she saw that they were happy, and that she alone was to be pitied, because she lingered here.

And weary, and languid, and distressed, she came to the Saviour, and in His warm heart and full sympathy she found rest.

Rosalind was tried by sorrow, and purified, even as gold is by the fire; she was crushed, poor thing, till she yielded, like the herb, greater fragrance.

'God's ichor fills the hearts that bleed;
The best fruit loads the broken bough;
And in the wounds our sufferings plough,
Immortal love sows sovereign seed.'

So it was in her case: the black foils of trouble made more manifest the jewel of divine grace in her. A time of softer tears came, and Rosalind was clothed in richer beauties than her own. She became more than ever like a simple, trustful child; riper and riper every hour, more fit for the eternal home, more moulded to God's will. She knew the stroke came from her Father's hand, and she drew nearer and nearer to Him, till she kissed the pierced hand that held the rod.

She was conscious that she had idolized those whom now she had lost, and she felt *that she* deserved what she deemed to be *God's punishment*. But she prayed God

for strength to bear it, and God gave her strength.

* * * * *

The light gleamed solemnly in, through the chinks of the dark-green Venetian blinds, on a room well garnished with white—Franz and Rosalind's own room; and there lay the three little children, like three little sleeping angels, all robed in white, with expressions that told of rapture as well as repose—expressions that painted death as life's bloom!

There were green leaves and winter berries gracefully thrown around them: their schoolfellows had brought these in. And in Eva's hand was one white winter-rose, that her grandfather had gathered from a spot in the garden where he had often wandered with her: he had placed that there. And outside the door Ulred's dog Rover kept a faithful watch.

What prevailed and pervaded over all was the impress of an intense woe; but there was no defiance, no distrust. Neither was it a barren suffering: there was extreme tenderness with the sorrow; a patient falling into the hands of One whom they loved and

trusted ; a cheerfulness in their suffering, from the feeling that it was sent in love. But there was a listening attitude in some of them, as if waiting for a heavenly call, or at least expecting soothing whispers from above.

There was not one in the village but loved the children, especially little Eva: old and young alike had a tenderness, a fondness of feeling for her; even her schoolfellows, light-hearted and thoughtless as they were, even they cherished her memory. They could not bear to miss her from her usual place in the school; they never passed the latticed window where she so often stood without feeling sad that they had lost her from among them. They missed her from the church, and they missed her from the churchyard, where she so often loved to wander. Was she an angel now above the bright blue sky, they wondered ?

And as to the poor old man, she had been the bright star in his existence. When he thought of her, she seemed to him like a beautiful dream. How happy she had rendered his life ! how kind, how gentle, how *good, how considerate* she had always been !

'How tenderly she used to wait upon me!' he said to his daughter. 'When I look forward to seeing her again, I think of her as smiling and being pleased to see me, and putting out her hand to lead me, as in days gone by. And I shall know her voice, Rosalind,' he added, as if the time had almost come.

How closely we are all linked together by one common bond! We have all the remembrance of one loved and lost one; thus love and grief bind us all as in one sheaf.

Some of the children's little favourites begged to see them, and brought flowers with them to strew around; but amidst all the grief and all the sympathy from young and old, one heard perhaps most often the words, 'God bless him!' as the poor blind old man, patient and resigned in his solitude, was seen passing up and down the familiar lanes that Eva and he had so often traversed together in search of wild flowers.

And what of poor Franz?

He found it very hard to realize that the children were dead—Eva, and Ulred, and Eulalie—his little all—their little all!—so

young, so beautiful, and so good! But he never murmured, though they had all faded from them like light upon a summer evening, and left all their horizon dark. He only kept silence.

At last, one day when Rosalind missed him for a longer time than usual, she found him on his knees in his own little studio. She would not disturb him; she thought it would comfort him to speak with his Father in heaven. And she heard him saying:

'Great Master! touch us with Thy skilful hand,
Let not the music that is in us die;
Great Sculptor! hew and polish us; nor let,
Hidden and lost, Thy form within us lie.

'Spare not the stroke; do with us as Thou wilt;
Let there be nought unfinished, broken, marred;
Complete Thy purpose, that we may become
Thy perfect image, O our God and Lord!'

CHAPTER IX.

THE MODELLED GROUP.

'In the still air music lies unheard;
In the rough marble beauty lies unseen;
To wake the music and the beauty needs
The master's touch, the sculptor's chisel keen.'

And Franz meant that this should be his *work.*

No sooner had he seen the children safely laid on his own bed, than he determined to exert his utmost skill to model a group of them for Rosalind before she lost them from earth for ever. It was the only thing he could do to comfort her in her grief.

Franz had nothing to add in design; he had only minutely to copy what he had seen when he found them.

There stood the old gnarled oak of the forest, with its fantastic roots wreathed in the most extraordinary manner high above the ground, as if to furnish a natural protection for the children. Its hollow trunk, the top of which was adorned with young twigs, formed a complete dome, from which hung an irregular fringe of icicles; while its twisted horizontal branches, spreading over a large surface, made it strikingly beautiful and majestic, and completed the idea of its sovereignty over all the trees of the forest.

Covered over with snow, bearing well its winter honours, it presented a picture worthy of the artist's rarest skill. Add to that, it had been riven by the lightning; and the ivy and mistletoe which formerly covered

that part had been tossed by the wind over one horizontal branch which stretched out to the left, as if in sacred office of sheltering the children; while the mistletoe and ivy which had been torn from their hold fell in festooned bowers of snowy beauty from it, forming an exquisite canopy over them, as resplendent in its effect as the stalactite and stalagmite caverns in the Isle of Iona. A graceful birch, with the elegant drooping of its bare boughs, bent down as if to weep over the sad scene.

Nature had indeed decked her little ones in a beauty peculiarly her own; for there they lay clasped in one another's arms, just as they sank to death—Ulred resting on Eva's shoulder, and Eulalie in between them. with her head in Eva's lap.

Franz worked night and day; and night and day there stood Rosalind, eagerly watching to see the loved faces come out in life-like picture-image beneath the master-hand of her husband. Nor was she disappointed; for he caught even the heavenly expression, and the children seemed to breathe! It was one *of the finest* subjects, perhaps, ever worked.

Rosalind thought it wonderful—the dexterity with which Franz modelled the clay, so as never to destroy his masterly touches by over-work. It caused her to marvel. The poetry of his inspirations delighted her. These, he said, he owed to his mother's early initiation of him in the charming tales and rich ballads of his native hills—that she had inspired him with a love of poetry, and thus refined his tastes; and no doubt the images she raised in his fancy did materially contribute to the excellence which characterized his work. But irrespective of all that, Rosalind knew that he was a born sculptor, destined to charm the hearts of men with the beauty of his designs.

How Franz worked and worked to complete his task! At last he had fairly gained all their forms, and the faces of Eva and Eulalie; and now his whole heart was set on accomplishing a living and enduring personation of Ulred, with his matchless symmetry, his silken curls, as glossy now as when last he bounded in from school and they swayed to and fro with the fulness of his young life.

He gazed on the child as he lay ther before him, and turning to the others (fo Leblanc happened to be there too), he begge them to leave him alone with his dead. Hi heart was yearning over his child!

Leblanc rose immediately and retired and Rosalind only stopped to imprint on kiss on her husband's lips, for her fond hear saw he was too full of grief.

When the last faint echo of her footstep had died away, Franz bowed his head upo Ulred, and broke forth in all the plaintiv eloquence of woe:

'Alas! my noble boy! that thou shouldst die!
Thou, who wert made so beautifully fair!
That death should settle in thy glorious eye,
And leave his stillness in this clustering hair!
How could he mark thee for the silent tomb,
My proud boy, Ulred!

'Cold is thy brow, my son! and I am chill,
As to my bosom I have tried to press thee;
How I was wont to feel my pulses thrill,
Like a rich harp-string, yearning to caress the
And hear thy sweet, "My Father!" from thes
dumb
And cold lips, Ulred!

'But death is on thee, I shall hear the gush
Of music, and the voices of the young:
And life will pass me in the mantling blush,
And the dark tresses to the soft winds flung;
But thou no more, with thy sweet voice shall com
To meet me, Ulred!

'And oh! when I am stricken, and my heart,
Like a bruised reed, is waiting to be broken,
How will its love for thee, as I depart,
Yearn for thine ear to drink its last deep token:
It were so sweet, amid death's gathering gloom,
To see thee, Ulred!

'And now, farewell! 'tis hard to give thee up,
With death so like a gentle slumber on thee.'

'But God has called thee, child—called thee home—claimed thee for His own; and I will not repine, for thou art happy there—happier far than I could ever have made thee even in this beautiful world, where everything seemed to shine upon thee. Father,' he said—

'Forgive my grief for one removed,
Thy creature, whom I found so fair,
I trust he lives in Thee, and there
I find him worthier to be loved.'

His outburst of grief over, he rose up calmly and recommenced his work; but his *heart* lingered there. He had ever been his only boy, and he loved him with a love such as a deep, rich nature like Franz's alone could know.

He thought how often he had seen him come bounding in from school; he thought of his childish evening prayer and evening hymn; he thought of the manhood in his

look; he thought of him singing, as he so often did, as merrily as the uprising lark when it shakes the early dew from its wing; he thought of him as he had often seen him, when sleep so gently kissed his eyelids; and he said, 'O my Father, give me grace to bear it!'

But still thoughts of him rose in his memory again and again, with his bewilderingly sweet smiles. He was his gifted boy; his bright, his fiery boy, that was a daily blessing but to see.

Do you call this weakness? Then it was only human weakness, such as marked our Divine Saviour; for Jesus wept o'er Lazarus dead. Beautiful tribute to the sacredness of friendship, and to the enduringness of love!

Poor Franz! he only murmured once, 'He sends me stripped and naked to the grave.' More often he whispered to himself, 'He fell in his saint-like beauty asleep by the gates of light.' More often he thanked God that the child's journey had been so short; that there was none of the world-weariness of the aged about him, and very *little even* of the taint of earth.

Death in him assumed almost the look of life; only the lips had no language—the changeful smile, in which love used to hide, never came now—no deep dimples played there. Only the peace which innocence has in death remained—that was there!

Franz had to learn that death as surely treads in pleasure's footsteps as night follows day. Ulred had come like a sunbeam to the earth, and he was gone; he had been full of a wild and irrepressible mirth, but it was all hushed; he had been cradled in peace and nurtured up in truth, and there was a lustre of angelic loveliness about him; but Death, the reaper, had cut him down!

And yet, though Franz knew it, he could not make him dead. In fancy he was ever bounding round him, or at his modelling, or in bed—the bed over which he had so often bent in love—or, he thought he heard his footfall.

If he went in the street and met a boy carrying his satchel, with the same beaming eyes and coloured hair, his gaze followed him; for he could scarcely believe but that it was his own boy—his own lost Ulred.

He *could not* make him dead—no, he still lived on in his memory, still lived on in his heart.

One day, after a long silence, Franz said to Rosalind:

> 'Grief fills the room up of my absent child,
> Lies in his bed, walks up and down with me,
> Puts on his pretty looks, repeats his words,
> Remembers me of all his gracious parts,
> Stuffs out his vacant garments with his form:
> Then, have I reason to be fond of grief.'

Yet when he remembered that he should meet him again in His heavenly Father's home, his heart was comforted, and, like a cheerful traveller, he took the road the Lord had appointed for him. He rejoiced in the Lord, and joyed in the God of his salvation; so that, notwithstanding his deep, deep sorrow, we may apply the Psalmist's words to him—'Happy is that people that is in such a case: yea, happy is that people whose God is the Lord.'

Leblanc—poor old man, so sensitive and refined!—kept out of his children's way, lest he should intrude on their grief; but at *night*, when Franz retired for an hour's rest, *he stole in* and sat down by the side of his

loved ones, and stroked Eva's face, and felt her hair once more; and you might have heard him cry, 'Oh, Eva, Eva! what were you to me!—and you are gone!'

It was a plaintively pretty sight—so much beauty and goodness mingled with so much grief!

The night before the funeral, Franz had sufficiently completed his arduous and difficult task to be able to perfect it afterwards; and Rosalind's rapt gaze, the eloquence of praise, fully repaid him. It was more to him than poet's, painter's, or sculptor's approbation.

She raised her hands in mute admiration; then, with her peerless symmetry, bent over the life-like clay, while one tear trickled down her lovely face. Then, throwing herself into her husband's arms—

'Thank you, Franz,' she said, 'thank you! You couldn't have given me anything I should have liked better. You're too kind to me—too kind!' she added with warmth.

'It's Love's monument to Grief, Rosie,' said Franz. Then he murmured to himself, as if unwilling to take the praise, 'All my *springs* are in *Thee*.'

Some time after, when it was quite finished, it was a *chef d'œuvre* of sculpture and poetry. All the tranquillity of Franz's manly soul showed itself in the work; if he had lived a lifetime to execute it, he could have wrought nothing better. But from day to day, for a lengthened period of time, he brought it to greater perfection, embellishing it both from his recollections and his sentiments of love, bringing thus unwittingly to view the feelings of his own soul.

One might see that just a transient gleam of suffering had passed over Eva's face—there was just a shade of melancholy in it; but what principally characterized her was a heroic calm, a sweet peace of the soul, impressed on all the features, combined with an intellectual strength to which the child, for her age, was no stranger. Eulalie, in all her child-like, simple beauty, her arm laid upon her head, with her golden locks that seemed even yet to gambol with the wind, lay, one leg thrown over the other, as if enjoying herself in an eternal repose, and looked as if she had been brought up on beds of roses; while Ulred appeared lost in reverie,

as he had so often appeared, sparkling with the beauty of blended health and strength and softness.

And there sat the dog on his hind-legs at Ulred's feet, his physiognomy expressive of grief and of exhaustion: his head thrown back, apparently in the act of howling piteously; tenderness swimming in the pupil of his eyes like a dark vapour, as it had gleamed there in his hour of distress.

It was a marvel of art. Franz had given to the distinct beauty of each child its most sublime character. There was room for the manifestation of every virtue and every talent, and he had displayed it. It was a masterpiece!

The three sleeping figures presented an image of eternal tranquillity, which produced an effect wonderfully like that of a summer day under an Italian sky, even to the casual onlooker; to Rosalind it seemed a symbol of heaven!

She almost deemed Franz a creator, he had so impressed life on his work; the cold marble glowed with it—it breathed!

But more, he was a poet, and that gave

wings to his imagination, and elevated his work above the ordinary sphere of the senses; a celestial spirit spread over it!

Her children were gone, and yet they were not lost to her! There they were, represented in the most attractive state for the imagination—a state of eternal youth, the spring-time of an unchangeable life.

She was enchanted; she was excited with love and tenderness—with the love and tenderness of a mother and a wife; her soul was plunged into a sweet ecstasy—she was in elysium, a rapture of feeling that sought repose in silence.

She felt too proud almost to admire; she had never aspired even to such success in her husband; she felt humbled by it. It was genius, and it was genius dowered with success. She did homage in silence. But what words can tell how in her heart she thanked God for his talent, as a gift of comfort just now?

That day Franz felt crowned by her look, more than any words or laurels could have crowned him. Talking to Leblanc afterwards, *he said, with* a gush of feeling from all the *warmth of his* noble heart:

'Do you know, her face looked down on me with a look that placed a crown on me!'

'Thank God even yet,' exclaimed the old man, 'that a true heart so may gain such a reward!'

CHAPTER X.

AND LAST.

'Ah! bitter chill it was;
The owl, for all his feathers, was a-cold;
The hare limp'd trembling through the frozen grass,
And silent was the flock in woolly fold.'

THE valley streams were frozen; the forest was naked, but for its covering of snow; the meadows were barren, the gardens desolate, and 'the seeds of the future were sleeping under the leaves of the past,' when the bell rang out its solemn toll, and the pride and health of the village of Blumenthal turned out to follow the Rosencrantz children to the grave.

The worn and weary were there, and the young and thoughtless; some in the full blush of promise, and some in the first dawn of life: one common bond brought them to the tomb—the bond of love. Leaves and

winter berries strewed the grave and the pathway to it: there stood the yew, there drooped the willow, and there the gadding ivy crept about.

The procession passed slowly through the churchyard, and entered the church; and the mournful cadence of Pastor Rosegarten's low, grave voice was heard where the pealing anthem had so often swelled the note of praise.

Then Eva, Ulred, and Eulalie were borne slowly along the churchway path, and laid to their long resting-place: and one could almost fancy that the quiet slumberers made room for them in their still home.

The service over, the mourners closed round the tomb to take one last look before they parted; but no word was spoken: they drew their breath softly, as if they feared to break the silence, even by so slight a sound. The fallen leaves rustled in the snow; the grass stirred upon the graves; the clouds were blown by hurrying winds across the sky; but all else was still—silent as the *grave!*

Then the mourners gave place, and fell off

in groups, till Max, the old sexton, was left alone to his doleful work: and it was late in the evening, when the moon was up, before he left the churchyard and went home.

No wonder there was grief throughout the village, as well as in the mountain-home; for they were all dead! Ulred, the once bounding boy, so full of life and spirit, noble, gifted, brave, and true! And the pensive, gentle, patient Eva was dead! Dead, too, the ethereal, spirituelle, rare, and radiant Eulalie!

All mute and motionless for ever! Gone!

'Mid the sound of the death knell's mournful music, Franz and Rosalind returned home with Leblanc, their father—to miss the footfall on the stairs, the old clear merry laugh, the warm caress. The garden was still: the place seemed vacant and empty: the haunts of their childish mirth were all deserted!

Gone!—written everywhere, on everything. They had passed away as a beautiful dream!

> 'How often from the steep
> Of echoing hills or thicket had they heard
> Celestial voices to the midnight air,
> Sole, or responsive each to other's note,
> *Singing* their great Creator!'

But that song was hushed now!

How often had they heard the prayer go up for the Saviour's evening blessing! But that incense, sweeter than the fragrant odours of spring, had ceased for ever!

What a violent, absolute disruption they had suffered! All the beauty, and strength, and power of their children cut down suddenly by the hand of Death!—their souls, as it were, 'whispered out with God's still voice.'

There was a deep struggle in Rosalind's soul, a strong cry—'Oh! for the light to reveal even in this mysterious calamity the unfathomable love of God!'

But it came: and once again that beautiful brow was all light—that childlike heart all gladness: influences, refreshing as the dew, fell on her from heaven.

Some flowers, we all know, yield their best fragrance in the night; and such a flower Rosalind proved in her night of sorrow. He Whose rain fills the flower-cups; Whose dew glitters on the fields; Who *rides on* the whirl-wind and directs the *storm,* was her Father. And He gave her

strength for the combat, and blessed her with peace.

She felt her children were only gone before —that they were gathered in to a brighter and a better home, and a *wonderfully* loving Friend: and she left them to His care. She knew they were walking a garden more beautiful than Eden's—beautiful as that was: they were treading the courts of the Heavenly Jerusalem! They were with Jesus, the little children's Friend, in Paradise! They were living in the luxury of love; and it was enough for her.

Sometimes God sinks wells of trouble, and puts His loved ones into them, that they may see His starry promises! It seemed so with Rosalind; for she not only stifled all unholy repinings, was patient, submissive, and gentle, but she was even cheerful: and in her season of deep trial she spread around a holy influence, and though herself the sufferer, she became the village teacher and comforter.

And, as for Franz, there was always a moral manhood about him. Rosalind and he were two of God's beautiful *thoughts*, in the valley of Blumenthal.

Notwithstanding their loss, they were as convinced that a living love and truth surrounded them, as that a human heart in the person of the Saviour had once lived, and thought, and suffered, and walked, in the land of Palestine.

Their style of speech was even simpler now, and yet their language was more charged with good. They both had beautiful souls, in beautiful bodies, which Plato used to say was the most beautiful of sights.

When Rosalind spoke, she spoke from her heart, and therefore other hearts were touched; she was the eloquent interpreter of their feelings: her own woes had taught her to feel for theirs. How mellowed, how soft, how sweet had religion's soothing influence made her! She did everything to the Lord: and He bore all her burdens for her, and fixed her heart on things above.

'Men love us, or they need our love,' she used to say with Keble; and she found it as he asserts—that the willing soul is easily filled with solace. Her cross brought her *nearer to* her God. Franz often heard her *saying,* 'Lord, what wilt Thou have me to

be? What wilt Thou have me to do? Where wilt Thou have me to go?' He knew that there is nothing better in the world than the faithful service of the restful heart: it is the restful heart that weeps with those that weep; and he could see that Rosalind's heart was restful in God. Patience, and abnegation of self, and devotion to others, were the lessons a life of trial and sorrow had taught her. She had neither hope nor wish now in life, but to follow meekly, with reverent steps, the sacred feet of her Saviour.

Rosalind was everything to her poor blind father. He said she was the golden thread that united him to his happy past; and the sound of her voice, or the touch of her hand, had always a strong beneficial influence over him.

Poor old man! What a tender tie had been broken when Eva was taken away! She disappeared and left him dark! But he had such implicit confidence in God, that he could not doubt His love. He thought of her, he told Rosalind, as clothed with immortal youth and beauty, amongst the angels of God in Heaven; as pure and perfect, and

in a robe of unsullied white, with a palm in her hand. He thought of her as in the enjoyment of unwearied service for Him Whom she so loved on earth, as in fellowship with spirits as bright and happy as her own. And he was content: he was more than content—he was happy, and thankful to God for it. And he thought, too, God knew his little Eva by name, and loved her with a love that individualized her from the thousands and tens of thousands that surround the throne; and then he knew she *must* be happy, and that heightened his joy.

But he dwelt very often now, with fresh gratitude, on the Saviour's kind invitation to the weary—'Come!' What a power that word had for him! There was One then still to whom he might go. The call was to himself, and that was just where he wanted to go. He felt sick, and it was the great Physician who said 'Come!'—then he would get healing—yes, the balm of love! He was weary, and he would get rest: he would go. He was called to come: then he would be *received!*

It takes a very little to persuade us to go

where we want to go. Rest to the weary seems a tacit invitation in itself — be it garden-bower or wayside bank. There was a deep response in Leblanc's nature to the call; and the poor blind old man went to the Saviour with his broken heart, and poured all the tale of his sorrow into His willing ear: and he was rested, and healed, and comforted; and he realized that his best Friend was still with him, and would be through eternal ages! He felt ennobled by such a friendship, and prized the thought of his immortality, that he might enjoy it for ever.

'Oh, Saviour!' he pleaded, when himself most conscious of the need of His presence and help, 'oh, Saviour! teach the sin-stricken and the mourner to put their trust in Thee, and come at Thy call: teach them to come just as they are, to come *now*.'

And there were times even yet when life seemed sweet to the old man; he was so like a little child—he lent such an innocent ear to the promises. And he would often say to his daughter, 'What I know not now I shall know hereafter.' And if there were

times when the shadows of life fell on him drear and cold, and he felt it harder to say 'Thy will be done' than he had in his golden sun-times, he knew where to go.

There is a tenderness in God greater than a mother's—an inexhaustible tenderness, to which hers is as nothing. He knew poor blind Leblanc's cross was heavy. He knew his idol was laid in the ashes, and it was no surprise to him that His pale lips shunned the holy words; but He quickened his faith till he was able to say, 'Not my will, but Thine, be done.'

What a happiness Leblanc found it, that though he was absolutely dependent on his Heavenly Father, he was not absolutely dependent on any other; that though He alone could satisfy the soul, yet He *could* satisfy it.

Meanwhile Rosalind shed, in her secluded path, a soft gentle light on all who trod it with her. She was the life and joy of many a poor fireside circle: the low tones of her voice sounded softly by many a sick bedside, *where* goodness and charity took her. And *one might* still sometimes hear her clear

laugh, like a music of rain, and one might still see the sympathetic tear glistening in her eye.

She and Franz lived happily in mutual love. Many and many an hour they passed in picturing the little ones whom they had so sadly lost, and in talking with Leblanc of his fondness for the children. Thus they called up the little faces that once clustered round their knees, and they heard again in fancy their pretty prattle.

A sacred mystery had drawn together the souls of Franz and Rosalind; and it still worked in them and bound them closer and even closer to one another.

'Mortal ! if life smile on thee, and thou find
All to thy mind,
Think Who did once from heaven to hell descend
Thee to befriend :
So shalt *thou* dare forego, at His dear call,
Thy best, thine all.'

THE END.

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